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Planning for new opportunities

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ISBN 978-87-403-0060-4

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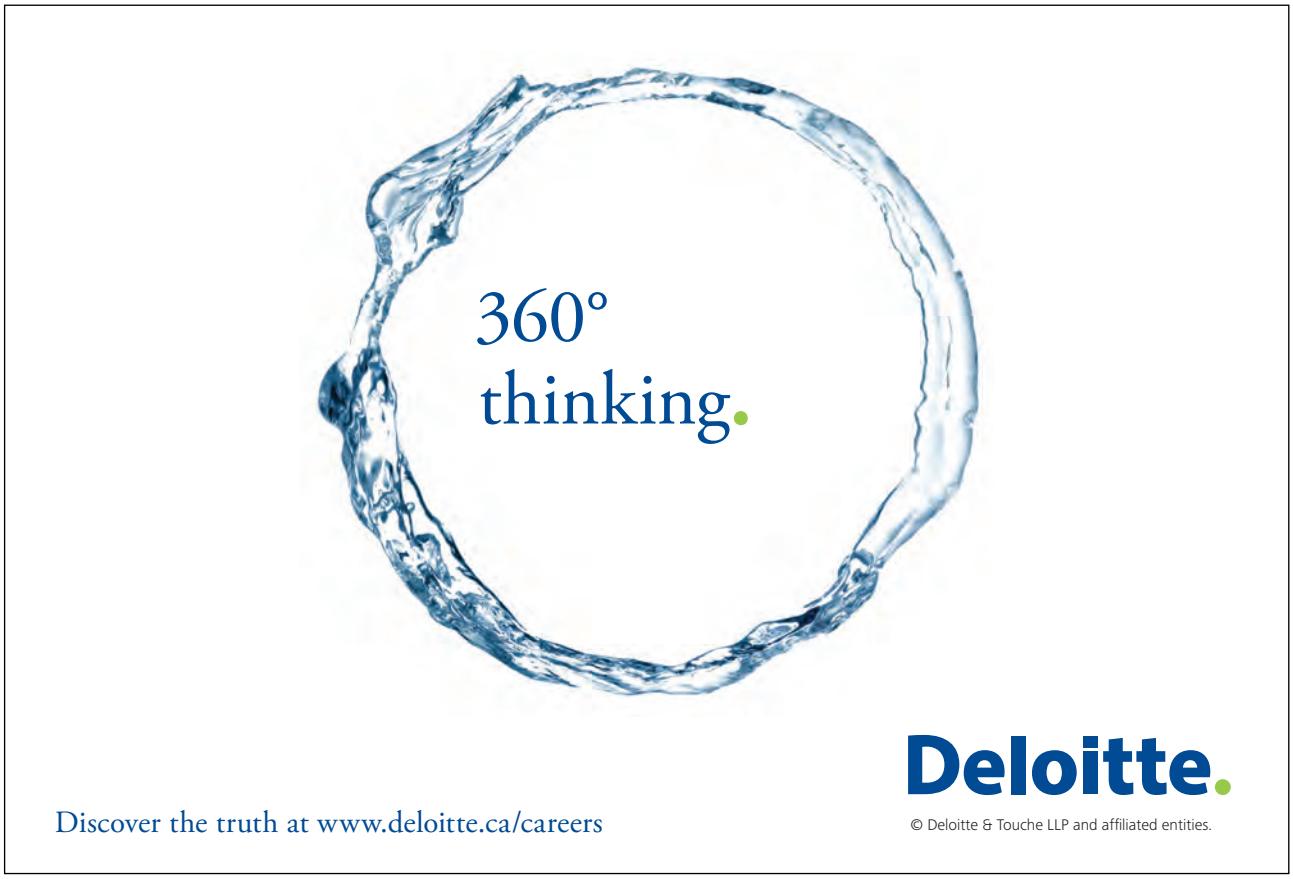
Contents

	Introduction	**6**
1	**What does it take to land a new job?**	**7**
1.1	Be proactive	8
1.2	Recognise the best in yourself	9
1.3	Learn from your experiences	10
1.4	Try something new	12
1.5	Set targets	12
1.6	Go the extra mile	13
1.7	Accept help from others	14
1.8	Job-hunting is a full-time job	14
1.9	Practical conditions	15
1.10	Step 1: Daily job-hunting timetable	16
2	**The overall parameters for your job search**	**17**
2.1	The overall parameters for your job search	18
2.2	Assignment	20



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3	**Your options and preferences**	**21**
3.1	Considerations	22
3.2	Use your experience	26
3.3	How to proceed	27
3.4	Look back to look ahead	28
3.5	Your level of ambition	29
3.6	Your values	30
3.7	Put your dreams into words	31
3.8	Kickstart your dreams	31
3.9	Your innermost dreams	32

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Introduction

'Planning for new opportunities' is a step-by-step booklet that helps you to understand what it takes to land a new job. We will cover the overall parameters for your job search and you will gain an overview of your qualifications and options, so you approach your job search in a more clearly targeted manner.

Our vision is to make it easier for you and help you find a new job as quickly as possible.

Students that are about to graduate often don't quite know how best to approach job-hunting. Being a jobseeker can be very stressful, because there are so many things you need to do.

Most people approach the task in a fairly disorganised manner and just muddle through.

'Planning for new opportunities' structures the process from start to finish, so that you approach job-hunting one step at a time.

The process is built up in such a way that once you have completed all of the steps, you'll have done everything possible to plan your job hunt and you are then ready to find your job.

At each step, you will acquire the knowledge and tools you need to find a job.

The idea is to help you get off to a good start and the 3 steps to do so are:

- **Step 1** What does it take to get a new job?
- **Step 2** The overall parameters for your job search
- **Step 3** Your options and ambitions

Each step consists of an explanatory text that provides in-depth information and guidance on how to approach the task at hand.

Once you have studied the text, you'll be all set to carry out each task in practice.

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1 What does it take to land a new job?

In this first step we look at how to find a new job as quickly as possible.

Despite the financial crisis, new opportunities still pop up all the time in all sorts of companies. Always bear in mind that it IS possible to find a new job.

Every company has people who hand in their notice, get promoted, take maternity or paternity leave, are on long-term sick leave and retire. This creates vacancies that have to be filled as soon as possible.

New businesses start up all the time, and they need staff. Some companies are doing very well and growing, so they regularly recruit new staff as well.

The big challenge for you as a jobseeker is to find these vacancies, write a good application and get the job. To do this, you have to:

- be proactive and seek out opportunities
- recognise the best in yourself – otherwise you won't be able to pass it on to others
- learn from experience – spend time on what works and produces results
- be willing to ask others for help
- be prepared to see job-hunting as a full-time job – albeit a temporary one.

If you accept these five points, you should be able to find a new job sooner or later.

In this step, you will read more about the above points, and what you have to do to land a new job.

It's important to realise that you are now your own boss. Your job is to go out and sell a product to a company – that product consists of your qualifications and personality

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1.1 Be proactive

Be prepared to be creative and proactive. Job-hunting requires extra effort on all fronts.
Decide to be proactive and take full responsibility for your situation. Don't sit down and wait for your dream job to be advertised. If you do, it may well be a long wait.

Think positively

Think in terms of options rather than limitations.

Despite that it might be difficult to find a job it's important that you look at the situation in a way that doesn't affect your self-confidence – and therefore your search for a new job.

For many it is tough mentally to be a job seeker. It's important to be open about your state of mind – it's OK to tell people that you don't feel great.

Just make sure that negative thinking doesn't come to dominate your job search – it may affect the tone of your applications, which will make it even more difficult to make a good impression and be called to an interview.

It's quite normal that you sometimes feel discouraged and worried about the future. This happens to us all. You mustn't feel that you're the only person in the world who feels that way. But it's important that it doesn't become a permanent state of mind. You have to make a conscious effort to change your mood and keep faith in the idea that you will succeed.

A good way of keeping up your spirits is to put into words what you're thinking and how you're feeling. Talk to somebody you know well – somebody who has a generally positive outlook on life, who is a good listener, and who is capable of providing input and making practical suggestions.

This will give you a boost and help you move on. If you talk about it with somebody who has a negative attitude, you won't move on. You'll both agree that things look bleak and you'll get nowhere. The trick is to turn to somebody you trust, someone who will help you move on – not hold you back.

The human psyche is such that if we have negative expectations for our future, then there is every likelihood that we will end up trapped in a negative spiral.

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Example:

You see in the news that unemployment is rising and you think to yourself: "I knew it! There's no point looking for a job." If you feel that way, when you see an ad for a job that is perfect for you, you won't be especially motivated to spend a lot of time applying for it. Your subconscious will already have absorbed the message that "there's no point".
You should always be acutely aware of what your subconscious is telling you, and try to maintain a positive attitude.

Look at it this way: You now have the chance to find a job where you can use your knowledge from your studies – and make a decent living! You should also come to terms with the fact that jobs don't grow on trees and that you'll have to put in a lot of effort if you are to succeed. We will look at exactly how to achieve this in the later steps.

1.2 Recognise the best in yourself

We have a tendency to judge ourselves extremely harshly. We see our failings and shortcomings instead of all the good things we have to offer.

When you are unemployed and looking for a job, it's easy to think "I don't have any training", "I have gaps in my CV", "I'm too young", and so on. But that will get you nowhere.

For a start, we're all flesh and blood. We all have our good and bad sides, things we're good at and other things we're not so good at, and life throws up new challenges all the time. Job-hunting is "just" another challenge that we need to face and cope with.

You need to focus on your best features – even if they're sometimes difficult to see through the black clouds hanging over you.

You need to convince yourself that you have fantastic qualities – both professional and personal – to offer your employer. If you can't see the good in yourself, you won't be able to present it in your application or put it into words during an interview.

It's essential that you learn to recognise the best in yourself and practise communicating it to others. This should be the starting point for your search for a new job. A good way of doing this is to ask other people, including former colleagues, to come up with observations about you – both positive and negative.

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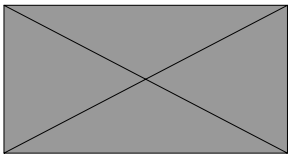
Ask them "What am I like as a person?" or "What was I like as a fellow student?" This will give you an insight into what others think of you, which you can use when you have to "sell yourself" in an application or interview.

"Hitting the wall" and feeling completely down about your situation is fairly natural. A large part of our identity is associated with our work. We are thinking, feeling people, so it's only natural that we take it personally when we are having difficulties in finding a job.

It's all too easy to feel that it will never end, that you are doomed to perpetual unemployment. But remember – nothing lasts forever. Something's bound to turn up if you keep going and keep being proactive. When you've been beaten down, the most important thing is that you get back on your feet. Make no mistake, it IS hard when rejections arrive in a steady stream and interviews are few and far between.

Make sure you spend time with other jobseekers. Read each other's applications and help each other to write better and better ones as you learn what works and what doesn't.

Share your experiences and tell each other what you've been up to since the last time you met. You may even have heard of a company that it would be worth approaching with an unsolicited application. Meeting up like this helps you build up the support network that's so crucial to your well-being. You'll see yourself reflected in the experiences of others. You'll see that you're not alone in the world; that others are just as frustrated as you.



1.3 Learn from your experiences

"If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always gotten." (Quote: Anthony Robbins)

If you want to succeed in finding a new job, you have to be prepared to improve and adjust your job-hunting techniques and methods all the time.

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For example, let's say that you've submitted a large number of applications, all of which have been rejected. You could keep doing what you've been doing, and get more and more frustrated and negative. In fact, this is what a lot of people do, arguing that so many people apply for each job that it's pointless.

Instead, stop what you're doing. Spend a little time finding out what you can do differently so you stand out from the crowd and increase your chances of being invited for interview.

Perhaps you've been applying for jobs for which you don't have quite the right qualifications. Or perhaps your applications don't really explain how well your qualifications suit the job. It may be that you need to adapt your CV.

Regardless of what's at the root of the problem, it's important that you relate each application to the actual job ad. Read the ad item by item and try to form a picture of the type of employee the company is actually looking for. Your task is to communicate your qualifications and experiences so that you are exactly the person described in the ad.

A lot of people make the mistake of including their entire CV in applications, but forget to explain why they are applying and precisely why they are the right person for the job. It's not enough to say "I'm passionate about this kind of job" or "This is my dream job" – you have to explain why you are passionate, why it's your dream job.

Try to reproduce the ad in your own words. Start by explaining the content out loud to yourself, even before you start to make notes. In your own words, tell yourself why the company should choose you. You'll then be ready to produce an appropriate application.

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Again, if you're having difficulty identifying the problem, then seek help from others. Sometimes it's helpful to get an outsider's view. Or it may be that the job description is a bit unclear, in which case it's a good idea to call the company and ask what type of employee they're really looking for.

1.4 Try something new

Most jobseekers make the mistake of only applying for advertised vacancies.

Everyone's making the same mistake, so there are plenty of people chasing the few ads and competition is fierce.

However, it's well known that three out of four vacancies are not advertised! They are filled by someone who knows someone – i.e. via personal networks. Some companies also keep a database of unsolicited applications.

So, if you want to find that elusive new job, don't be afraid to try something new. Make the most of your network – ask friends, acquaintances and former colleagues if they know of companies that welcome unsolicited applications.

Find companies that you want to work for and spend your time writing and submitting new applications. It may not work right away but it will produce results in the long term. Think of it as sowing a lot of seeds that, sooner or later, will sprout and bloom.

1.5 Set targets

A good way to keep your spirits up and motivation high, even if it sometimes requires a great deal of self-discipline, is to set yourself tangible targets. They must, of course, be realistic, achievable and designed to bolster your self-esteem.

Some people find it helpful to set a target for when they will have found a new job. For example, "Exactly three months from today, I'll have a new job". This gives you a tangible goal to work toward and a light at the end of the tunnel.

However, we all know that it's not enough just to set an overall objective and then sit back and believe it will all work out.

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First of all, you have to dedicate yourself to achieving your goal. You have to be prepared to do what it takes to succeed. You have to have faith in the mission.

Now that you've set a deadline for your overall objective (i.e. getting a job), you can set other targets for what you want to achieve on a daily and weekly basis. For example, draw up a list of the companies you want to contact on an unsolicited basis each week, and how many applications you will submit in a given time frame. You can also draw up a list of people you have come across in the past and set dates for renewing your acquaintance with them.

This makes your job-hunting more strategic. Hopefully, over a period of time, you will see that you are drawing closer and closer to your ultimate objective: to get a job.

1.6 Go the extra mile

A lot of people submit applications for vacancies then just sit back and wait for a response, but get frustrated because they don't hear anything or they receive yet another rejection.

Sometimes, they can wait a very long time. One week stretches into another, and then another... Sitting back and waiting isn't good enough – not even when times are good, and certainly not in the current challenging economic conditions.

Instead of just doing what everyone else does, be prepared to make an extra effort. Call the company and draw attention to yourself even before you send your application. Once the company has received your application, call them again.

This may sound really simple, but it's outside the comfort zone of a lot of people, and they'd rather not. It may feel awkward, but get over yourself and do it anyway. What's the worst that can happen? In the best-case scenario, you end up with a job…

Besides, when you've done it once, it's much easier to do it a second time. As a rule, you'll tend to find that you end up having a good chat with the person on the other end, and learn more about both the job and the company. It's also a good way to show the company that you are genuinely interested.

It may be precisely this phone call that gets you an interview – and, ultimately, lands you the job.

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1.7 Accept help from others

As mentioned previously, it's incredibly important that you ask other people for help and feedback. The more people who read your applications, and the more you find out about how you are seen as a person and colleague, the greater the chance that you'll stay positive.

There's a very delicate balance to strike here – you don't want to turn your friends and colleagues off by making it sound as if the whole world revolves around you and your need for a job. Keep it tangible, ask for practical feedback and assistance – don't indulge in anything that might sound like moaning or self-pity.

You should also be able to turn to those around you if you are down over a rejection. It's hard sometimes. When you hit a bad patch or when you're a little more sensitive than normal, a rejection can feel that much worse.

It's important to let the people around you know when you are going through a bad patch and need support, rather than honest feedback about why they think you didn't get the job.

Everybody likes to help, but they need to be asked first. The initiative has to come from you. In other words, you have to ask for the help you need.

1.8 Job-hunting is a full-time job

A lot of people make the mistake of simply not spending enough time on their search for a job. They maybe only spend five hours a week actively seeking work, and it shows in their lack of success. It can take months – and, in extreme cases, even years – to find a new job. And why draw it out?

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Job-hunting is a time-consuming process and should be thought of as a full-time job. Decide how many hours you'll spend each day or each week looking for a job.

You might, for example, decide to spend 37 hours a week on it. In that case, simply plan a working day, for example 8:30 am to 4 pm, during which you conduct concentrated and targeted research into companies, write applications and call various contacts.

Job-hunting is an active process, and your input has to be regular and consistent. Think about how you use your time. Be self-disciplined. Put in a 37-hour working week.

Effective job-hunting requires:

- determination
- consistency
- patience
- focused effort

1.9 Practical conditions

- Set up an "office" where you can work undisturbed
- Structure your day Set aside a fixed period for your job search every day
- Plan your working day, preferably using the "daily job-hunting timetable"
- File your correspondence

Help those around you understand your situation.

Assignment

Question 1: By when do you want to have landed a new job?
Question 2: How many hours per day do you wish to spend job hunting?
Question 3: Have you informed your family about the amount of effort you intend to put in?

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1.10 Step 1: Daily job-hunting timetable

Date: _____

Activities	Purpose and result	✓
08:00		
09.00		
10.00		
11.00		
12.00		
13.00		
14.00		
15.00		
16.00		
17.00		

Enter all of your daily activities. For example: writing/rewriting CVs, sending applications, preparing for/attending meetings, research, phone contact, preparing for/attending interviews, etc.

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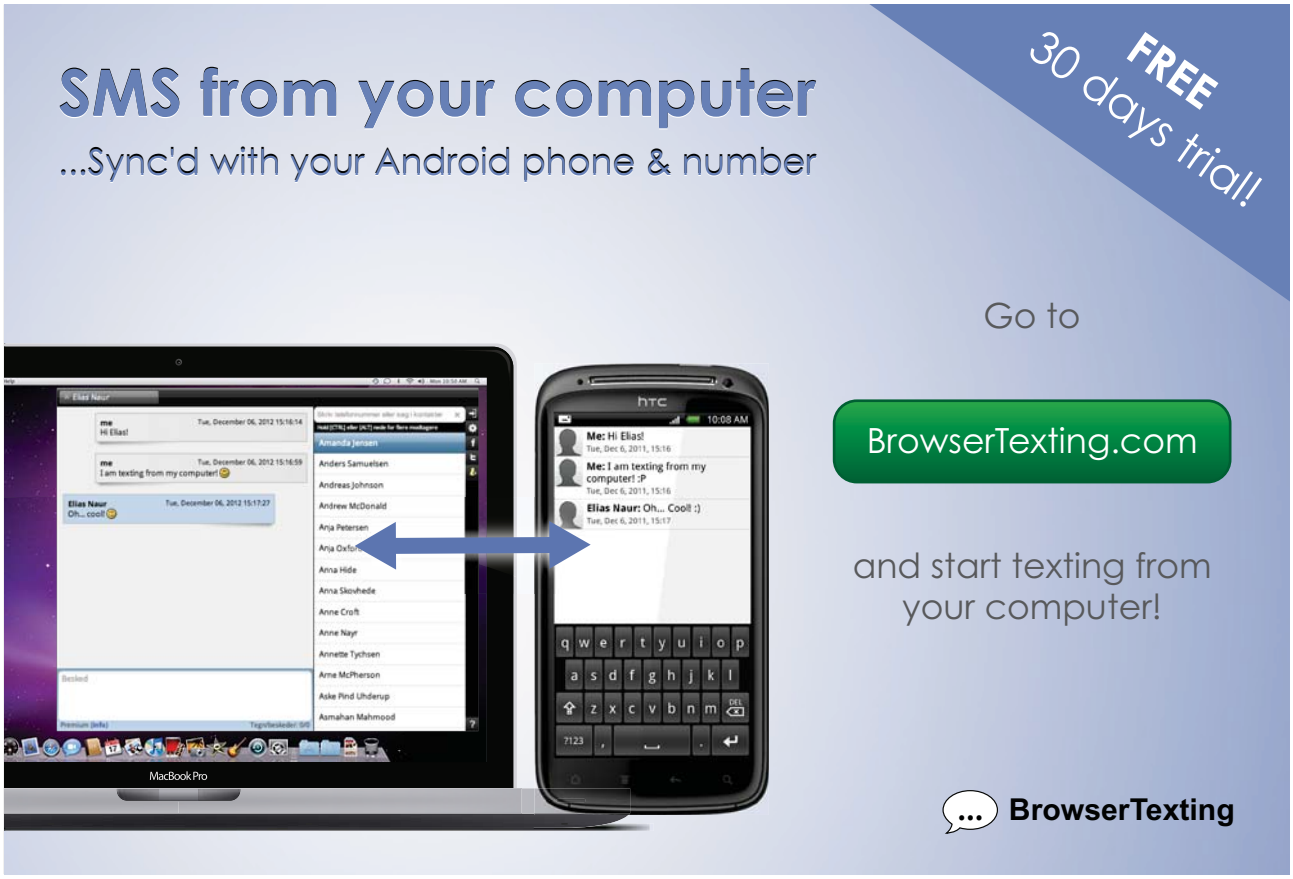
2 The overall parameters for your job search

Before you launch into actual job-hunting, it's worthwhile spending some time identifying the more general parameters for your job search.

The overall parameters are:

- geography (location)
- working hours
- pay

This will help you to focus your efforts on applying for jobs that suit you.



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In this step, we describe in brief, how to define a geographical area for your search, and how to decide about working hours and pay.

At the end, you'll be asked to answer a number of questions about geography, working hours, and pay.

Answering these questions will help you discover where your pain threshold lies, and how far you are willing to stretch.

2.1 The overall parameters for your job search

Geography

Geography is an important consideration when looking for a job. You need to decide which parts of the country you'd be willing to work in.

A good way of narrowing down the geographical area is to estimate how long a commute you are prepared to put up with.

It's also important that you assess how mobile you are. Do you have access to a car, or are you dependent on public transport?

If we say one hour each way – how big does that make your geographical area? And what if you put that up to one and a half hours — how big a catchment area does that give you?

Ask yourself: "If the right job turns up, am I willing to invest in a car if it's the only way to do the job?"

Or if it turns out to be difficult to get a job in your area, are you willing to invest in a car and therefore increase your mobility and the geographic range of your search?

Answering this question will quickly define one of the main parameters for your job search.

Working hours

As well as geography, think about how many hours you're prepared to work in order to strike the right work-life balance.

This is particularly important for single parents, for example, or families with children where the partner works at certain times, so it's your job to pick up and drop off the kids.

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Do family commitments mean that you can only work during the day? Or are you also willing/able to take evening or night shifts? Are weekend shifts an option? Etc.

The ability to work unusual hours is often an advantage over others who are only able to work the day shift.

You also have to decide how flexible you are able to be. For example, will you sometimes be able to turn up earlier or work later?

It's important to decide on all of these things before you start submitting applications.

Wage expectations

Most of us work to earn money so we can pay the rent or mortgage and other fixed expenses. It's therefore important that you think about what kind of wage you expect and what you need to earn as a minimum.

Try to work out your fixed costs. Could you perhaps cut down on some of your outgoings for a while? You might want to ask your bank for help in drawing up a budget. Then work out exactly what you need to earn so it all adds up each month.

Some jobs – particularly in the public sector – have very specific wage grades determined by collective-bargaining agreements, so there isn't much room for personal negotiation.

In the private sector, on the other hand, it's often possible to negotiate various allowances on top of your salary. But if you go to an interview without doing your homework, you run the risk of finding out that the wages on offer are far too low for your outgoings, or finding out later on that you colleagues are earning more than you.

If you are invited to an interview, make sure you know what wage level to expect.

In other words, it's crucial that you do your homework about the potential pay for the job concerned. If you are member of a trade union, it will be able to furnish you with wage statistics for various jobs. Or you can seek out the union representative in the workplace and ask how much you could reasonably demand as a starting salary.

Once you have worked out the average wage and found out what somebody with your experience would be paid in the workplace concerned, you can work out how much to ask for. Before you go to the interview, you should work out three figures:

1) Your first offer, which is a bit higher than you hope to end up with
2) A wage that you would be satisfied with
3) Your absolute minimum acceptable salary.

Once you've drawn up your budget and know what you need to earn to meet your fixed costs, you'll then work out these three figures and keep them in the back of your mind during the interview.

You'll have to work out those three figures each time you go for an interview, because wages may vary from workplace to workplace – even if the work is the same.

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2.2 Assignment

Question 1: What form of transport do you have at your disposal?
Question 2: How long could your budget cope with you being on benefits?
Question 3: How long are you prepared to spend on a daily commute?
Question 4: What working hours would suit your personal life?
Question 5: Do you have children who have to be dropped off or picked up?
Question 6: What is the earliest/latest you have to drop them off?
Question 7: Are you willing to take evening/night work?
Question 8: Can you start earlier in the day or work longer?
Question 9: What do you expect to get paid?
Question 10: What is the absolute minimum pay that you would be able to accept?

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3 Your options and preferences

Job-hunting is very much about having qualifications that you can "sell" to prospective employers. But before you can do that, you have to identify your qualifications and the type of jobs where they would be valuable.

Too many people apply for jobs for which they are not qualified. As the rejections pile up, they end up feeling frustrated. This can be avoided if you take the time to find out what you are capable of and what you would like to work with.

If you do not know your most important qualifications, you will not be able to communicate them to prospective employers or know what types of jobs you have the best chance of an interview for. It is therefore important that you put words to what you are capable of.

Once you have an overview of your qualifications, you can begin to consider whether you can use your qualifications in other types of jobs - or in a different way than in the past.

In this step, we will first describe how you find out what you are capable of and what qualifications you have.

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This involves you taking a step back and looking more closely at:

- your work experience
- your qualifications from previous jobs
- your personal qualities
- your pastimes
- your job search in a wider perspective – looking forward.

Another good way of identifying your qualifications is to talk to people who know you really well. They will be able to tell you about qualifications that you are probably not even aware that you possess. For example, you could talk to former colleagues and ask them to describe you as a colleague and as a person, so you get to know about both your professional and personal sides.

During the next step in the process, you will once again be asked to answer a number of questions. This may well take some time, because the point is to see yourself in the round, as a whole person.

In brief, you will gain an overview of your qualifications and options, so you approach your job search in a more clearly targeted manner.

3.1 Considerations

Based on your background, experience and personal attributes, you should think about defining the overall parameters for your future job.

Try to ask yourself the following questions:

- Who are you?
- How have you spent your life to date?
- What skills do you have?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses in a work situation?
- What do you want?
- What jobs are relevant to you?

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Clarification

Before you begin your job search, we recommend that you spend some time trying to clarify what is the right job for you.

Clarification is about becoming aware of yourself, your values, skills and level of ambition. This ensures that your job search will be focused and increases the chance of finding a job that is right for you.

Use your past experience to define:

- your needs and expectations for your future job
- what type of job you want
- what type of business or industry you want to work in
- the types of job in which you thrive, professionally and personally
- what type of people you work best with
- whether you are individually- or team-oriented
- your level of ambition – now and in the long term
- any areas in which you could improve your professional competences, e.g. through training courses/ educational programmes.

Work experience

A good place to start is to look at your work experience if you have worked while studying. Through your previous jobs you have built up a large amount of experience - both human and professional.

Try to make a list of the sectors in which you have worked, and whether you have experience of a specific industry that might serve you well in the future.

What jobs have you had? What jobs did you particularly like, and what was it that made you not like the other ones as much? Focus on the content of the jobs you've had and map out the qualifications you've used along the way. This will give you an idea of what to look for in your future job.

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Type of company

You should also consider the type of company you would most like to work for. Big or small, for example?

Think about the type of workplace culture in which you personally thrive. Should it be a very formal and traditional corporate environment? Or perhaps a less hierarchical organisational structure?

There are advantages and disadvantages to both. In a more formal business, your position and your duties are very much defined, so you are well acquainted with the parameters within which you work.

However, in a company with a less hierarchical structure, you define your own job content to a much greater extent, and it will probably change all the time.

The type of company in which you thrive therefore depends very much on what you are like as a person and whether you prefer your job to have a lot of structure, or very little. You know yourself best, so it's up to you to identify the parameters of your next job.

Do yourself a favour and be as honest as possible. It's too short-sighted to say that you can live with this or that, only for it to end up being a source of stress and having a negative impact on your working life. You should make up your mind in advance about the kind of working day you want in your next job.

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Your qualifications

Try to review the various posts you've held. What new qualifications did you acquire from them?

A good way of doing this is to list the specific duties for each of your previous jobs. Look at your old job from an outsider's perspective. Imagine you have to describe it to somebody who has no idea what the job entailed. Get it all down –it's better to write too much than too little. Later, you will select the most appropriate qualifications in order to write more targeted CVs.

Here, too, we recommend that you use others in your circle as sparring partners. Perhaps a friend or former colleague. They will almost certainly remember qualifications that you've overlooked or taken for granted.

Once you have a complete list of your qualifications, you will be in a better position to assess your options.

The trick is to broaden your horizons and think in terms of new opportunities – perhaps now is the time to try something completely new, if that's what you would like to do.

Discuss your options with other people. They will probably suggest things that you haven't even considered. Other people are often able to spot opportunities and openings because they see you in a different light than you see yourself.

They might say "Well, you'd be the perfect receptionist", "You're really good with people – have you considered working in customer service?" or "You seem to be somewhat stuck in your council job and you're clearly looking for a completely different direction. Have you considered becoming, for example, an executive secretary in a private company?" or something else that you hadn't thought of.

Some of it may be inspiring, some of it you'll just shrug off, but all of it will help you to form an overall impression of your own competences and consider whether you might like to work with any of their suggestions in the future.

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Your personal qualities

You now know all about your professional qualifications. The next step is to look at your human qualities.

If you were to describe your personal qualities purely in terms of work, what would be your best characteristics? Identify all the positive things about you as a person that are also advantageous in the workplace.

For example, maybe you are service-minded or helpful, or good at working on your own. It's important to include these qualifications and articulate them properly – otherwise you won't be able to communicate them to a potential employer.

Your pastimes

However, it is not only at work that we acquire and develop our personal and professional qualifications. You may have picked up qualifications in your free time that you can use in your job search.

If, for example, you have been active in the guide movement or a local sports club, then you have experience with children and young people that might be useful if you opted for a job involving kids. You have experience of teaching methods and you are used to being part of a team. It is important to include these qualifications in your application – if, that is, they are relevant to the job concerned.

Try to look at your pastimes again – you may have overlooked useful qualifications.

3.2 Use your experience

The fact that you are looking for a job gives you the chance to find one in which you will thrive. Incredibly, many of us have had jobs where this was not the case.

Now that you have the chance, we recommend that you start to look more closely at the good and bad aspects of your previous work experience. Use these experiences to define what it will take for you to feel good about your job and enjoy going to work.

Most of us are good at expressing what we are dissatisfied with – and especially what we absolutely will not stand for – but we forget to define what it is we want or dream about.

Whether you are good or bad at focusing on what you want rather than what you are unhappy with, it is necessary that you change your attitude and mental approach to work.

You owe it to yourself, your colleagues and your family to be happy and satisfied with your working life. To move forward, you must learn from your experiences and use them in a constructive way.

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3.3 How to proceed

A good way to start is to list everything you've been unhappy with in your previous jobs. This will help you define what you don't want in the future. It's a good idea to work through the list several times to make sure you get it ALL down.

Then try to turn each statement into something positive and constructive by writing down what you would prefer instead. What would it take for you to be satisfied?

Before you start to work with the positive list, bury the "list of moans". Have a good look at your original list and reflect upon what your life has been like so far. Decide that this is all in the past, and then rip the list to pieces. (It may sound a little childish, but it works!)

Imagine that you move into a new house and you think the walls are a really ugly colour. You have two options: you can choose to keep the colour in the hope that one day you'll find the time to repaint. Or you can choose to take action immediately and paint the house in colours that make you feel good.

If you delay the process, you'll come home every day to the same ugly colours and think "I hate this house". Act immediately and you'll enjoy a home that has your personal touch.

Similarly, you have to deal with what has made you unhappy in your professional life so far. Do this by extrapolating on each statement on the positive list.

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This exercise may be a bit of a challenge. For example, if you have written "I want a good boss", then you'll need to describe what you mean by "good" in this context.

Be more specific, e.g. "A boss who respects me and whom I respect." "A boss who is always close at hand. A good sparring partner. One who can give me constructive feedback on my daily work." "A manager who delegates responsibility to the staff", etc.

3.4 Look back to look ahead

Another example might be that you might have written "I want a working day where I feel happy and satisfied." But you must try to define what will it take for you to feel happy and satisfied. Being happy and content is an abstract desire. A cat that gets a tin of tuna is both happy and contented, but most people expect a little more. Articulate it.

If it still seems difficult to describe happiness in words, try to think back to job situations where you actually felt happy. Try to analyse the facts and circumstances that defined that job and meant that you felt good about the situation.

This exercise may take a while, but that's OK. Think of it as an evolutionary process. It's about finding what it will take to help guarantee happiness. Given that you're looking for a job anyway, you might as well try to find the best one possible.

After describing what you want in specific and tangible terms, the next step is to structure the content. One way to do this is to divide the list into sections, e.g. "job content", "boss", "colleagues", "workplace culture", etc.

Now you know what you're looking for

You've now used your negative experiences as the basis for an overview of what you want to replace them with. You know exactly what you want from your next job and the requirements and criteria that must be met before you'll be able to thrive and be happy.

So you're now ready to start looking for a new job that's consistent with your wishes and expectations. The list you've drafted means that you'll be easily able to assess the potential positions that you encounter. Not just when you read an advertisement, but also when you attend interviews.

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The important thing is to remember that you don't want to take a job at any cost. Use the list to help you determine whether the job you've applied for or been interviewed for is one in which you'd thrive.

Most people can – if they pay attention to the signs – sense whether they're interested just because they want any old job, or because they really believe that they'd thrive in this one.

You may discover during this analysis phase that your past work situations keep coming back to you. It may be that you often end up having problems with colleagues with a particular personality, or with bosses who treat you in a certain way, or perhaps you have trouble saying no, or you have a tendency to feel bitter that you are "rewarded" for being the fastest in the department by having to pick up other people's slack, etc.

If you recognise some of the examples above – or similar situations – we recommend that while you're between jobs you spend some time working on breaking out of these patterns. No one else can change them for you.

You may even benefit from consulting a life coach in order to deal with recurring patterns. The point is to take advantage of the fact that you will soon have a new job, where you can start afresh, in order to improve your ability to handle things you have struggled with previously.

However, no matter how well you do your homework, your dream job will not necessarily come up immediately. But when it does, you'll be ready – because you know exactly what you're looking for.

Conversely, it also demonstrates particularly good discernment and personal strength to say no to a job that you know will draw you back down into a negative spiral of discontentment.

3.5 Your level of ambition

It's a good idea to see your job search in a broader perspective. Ask yourself how you imagine your working life in 5–10 years.

Do you envisage that you will keep doing the same as you used to do, or would you like to try something new? And if you think that you would like to change direction, perhaps you should start taking steps now to steer you towards this goal.

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3.6 Your values

We also recommend that you spend some time reflecting on the values that are most important to you. What is important to you? At this particular point in your life, what do you prioritise most – your career or your family? Do you dream of a completely different career, or do you still harbour ambitions in the field in which you've been working?

Please note that values are variable. They may change depending on what stage you're at in your life. If you've just had children, your family is likely to take priority over your work. Later, when the kids are bigger, your perspective may change as you begin to prioritise your career over being a parent.

Now that you're a jobseeker, this may be your first and last chance to stop and think about what you really want to do with your life.
What do you dream about?

As children, we are good at fantasising. But many of us lose that ability with age, as logic and rationality take over at the expense of imagination and dreams.

But dreams have an important function: they tell us something about what we really want and what we want to achieve in life. By being aware of our dreams, we create a useful beacon to guide us.

To coin a proverb: "If you can dream it – you can do it." From a purely psychological perspective, our brains are structured in such a way that our dreams are on the same level as our abilities.

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The difference is that nothing tangible comes of dreaming. To succeed, it's necessary for us to act upon our dreams. Ask yourself: "If you did not feel constrained by everyday norms, but could define your professional life entirely according to your wishes, how would it look?"

Some see this as a slightly provocative and dangerous question – which is intentional on my part – but mostly I get no answer or "I've never really thought about it..." OK, but try... Now!

3.7 Put your dreams into words

As adults, we should allow ourselves to dream. We shouldn't consider it a waste of time, because dreams often help guide us in the right direction.

I would venture that anyone who can find and cultivate his or her dream will automatically be able to overcome every obstacle he or she encounters on the way to fulfilling it. Dreams are a powerful force that opens up our inner resources.

Spend 5–10 minutes writing down everything that you dream of in your professional life. Here, it's important to really let rip – don't listen to the inner naysayer who whispers "It can't be done because..."

Put yourself above that. Try to think big. Don't hold back. Let your imagination run wild. Try to picture yourself in different roles. Don't be constrained by norms and common sense.

3.8 Kickstart your dreams

If you find it difficult to get started, it may be helpful to look back to your childhood and adolescence and remember what you used to dream that life would bring.

If that's too overwhelming, ask yourself the following questions:

- What would your ideal career look like?
- Do you want to make a difference?
- Do you dream of fame and fortune?
- What kind of work do you dream of doing?

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- What gives your life meaning?
- What would you regret not to have accomplished when you retire?
- What is it that really interests you?
- Do you want to run your own business?
- Do you want to be a CEO?

Drop any kind of modesty when you answer the questions. Think big, be a little crazy – and daring! It won't do you any harm.

3.9 Your innermost dreams

Once you have articulated your dreams, the next step is to weed them out a little bit. Life is such that everything has its time. For example, if you dreamed of becoming a professional footballer but you haven't played actively for several years, you should probably give up that dream. If the dream had been that important to you, then you'd probably already have done something about it.

You may find that some things are not an expression of your dreams, but rather the outside world's and society's wishes or dreams on your behalf. In other words, they don't actually represent your innermost dreams, but visions inflicted upon you, i.e. something that others think will be good for you. Bearing this in mind, go back over the list and remove those dream that are not 100% your own – here, again, it pays to be honest.

This will leave you with a number of points on the list that should fill you with energy and enthusiasm, because they represent what you ideally want to be or work with.

Formulate the individual points in such a way that they become a coherent storyline – or set of general parameters – that describe how you want your career and your life to be. Note how this makes you feel.

An accurate picture of your dream

You have now created an accurate and vivid picture of what it is you want. This is your dream and your vision. It will enable you to focus your efforts in a positive manner, because you have found your guiding star and your direction in life.

This in itself is a milestone, but it is also a new challenge, because you don't yet know the path in detail – and you still need courage and an open mind.

Assignment

In this assignment you'll discover:

- What I am capable of (my professional background)
- Who I am (my personal qualities and leisure interests)
- What I want (my job options)

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My professional background	
Question1	What industries have I worked in?
Question2	What jobs have I had in the past?
Question3	What duties did these jobs entail?
Question4	What have I really enjoyed working with?
Question5	What qualifications did I gain from the job?
Question6	How might these qualifications be deployed in other types of jobs and industries?
My personal qualities	
Question7	What am I like as a colleague and employee?
Question8	What are my strengths?
Question9	What personal qualities would I like to improve (my weaknesses)?
Question10	What does it take for me to thrive as a person in a job?

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Question11	Do I prefer working alone or in a group?
Question12	Is it important for me to have a say in my work?
Question13	Do I prefer fixed duties and knowing exactly how things are done?
Question14	Is it important for me to have plenty of time to do my work?
	My leisure interests
Question15	What are my leisure interests?

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Question16	Are any of the skills I use in my leisure time transferable to the job market?

Based on 'Who I am' and 'What I am capable of', you'll now look at 'What I want' and therefore, what job options you have:

My job options	
Question17	What type of business or industry do I want to work in?
Question18	What requirements and expectations do I have of my next job?
Question19	What type of job do I want?
Question20	Any areas in which I could improve my professional competences, e.g. through training courses/ educational programmes
Question21	What is my level of ambition – now and in the long term?
Question22	My job options – 1st priority
Question23	Other options